



# MONITORING REPORT ON HATE SPEECH IN BIH

LEJLA GAČANICA

Author:

Lejla Gačanica

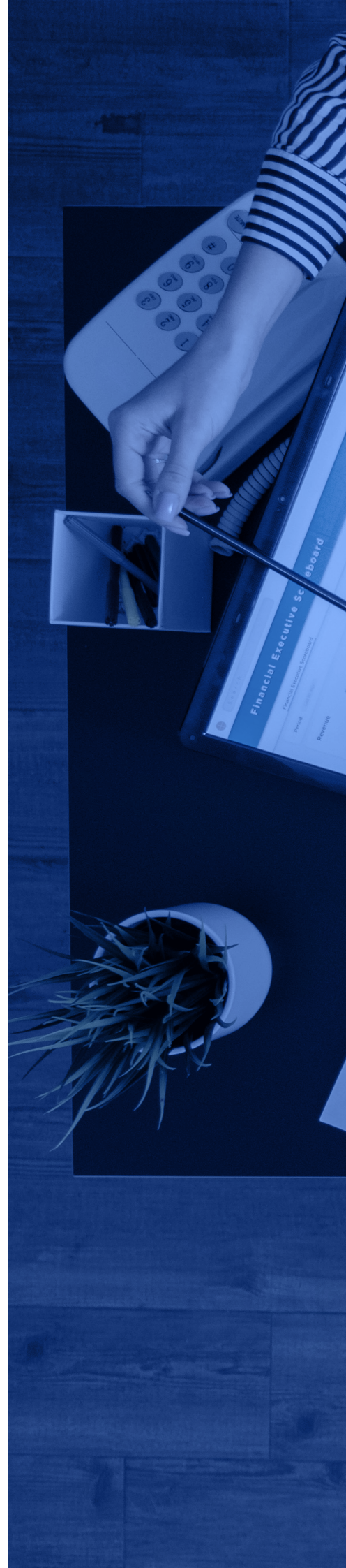
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# Introduction

Hate speech has become normalized in Bosnia and Herzegovina's public space. It is used by politicians, media, influencers; it is used to discredit, belittle, achieve political goals, sow discord. All this is not new, but the question that is asked here - is hate speech changing and why?

The context in which hate speech develops and is maintained in Bosnia and Herzegovina is shaped by several factors: the high prevalence of themes from the war of the 90s, which are the result of the absence of a constructive dealing with the past; a deeply patriarchal and traditional society, whose full transition to a system of democratic values in which minorities enjoy equal rights has not yet taken root (both legally and socially); absence of punishment and responsibility for criminal acts of hate speech. In addition to this, citizens have a low level of trust in politics, media, and institutions. Social networks and online media remain points of "freedom of speech", but this freedom is perceived as absolute and often turns into its opposite - hate speech.

This report deals with the analysis of media monitoring in BiH, conducted by the Centre for Investigative Journalism. The aim of the monitoring was to identify cases of hate speech, to classify against whom (on what basis) they are directed, which actions they contain, in what format they appear and from whom they come and where they are placed. Report will analyse the examples of hate speech, goals behind them, as well as their dynamics and contexts. The key goal of the research is to provide credible information and evidence in order to strategically approach the issues of hate speech and strengthen the efforts against its presence in public discourse in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As findings shows, there are new tendencies and also continuation of previous ones. Hate narratives have been build for a long time, and these processes are intervening with current socio-political events. Few years ago, pandemic has a serious impact and developed the whole narrative (and movement) of anti- vaxxers. In previous report, covering period 2020-2022, migrant flows developed very quickly strong narrative against migrants. Both still exist in BiH, but not to the level of intensity as it was while it was topical in the country. However, ethnic, gender, sexual minority, political affiliation remains main and dominant ground for hate speech. Actors also remain same – politicians, media, influencers. The comment sections on social media platforms and online media serve as one of the channels for disseminating hate speech.

New in this period was the deterioration of the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the positioning between Russia and the European Union, cruel cases of femicide, the geopolitical situation that is inevitably reflected in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This report will question how this context affected hate speech. At the same time, it is important to notice which trends are being established because the response to hate speech is still not at a satisfactory level in BiH.



# 1. About monitoring

Monitoring covered the period from April 1st 2022 to December 31st 2023. In total, 97 cases of hate speech were evidenced in this period.

This report will focus mainly on patterns and examples of hate speech in media, examining the following questions: what are the most common targets, what are the main ideas and messages behind hate speech cases, what actors and events serve as main generators of hate and disinformation narratives and what are the reactions. This research applies the concept of hate (speech) and propaganda in media and communication in broader sociological terms and not limited to legal concepts. In this research, analyses of hate narratives are not limited solely to unlawful hate speech (incitement to hatred) nor by characteristics for identifying an individual or group as the target of hate speech to those protected by narrow legal definitions of hate speech. Hate speech targets people, as individuals or groups, because of who they are.

The monitoring was performed by a journalist from the Centre for Investigative Reporting, applying a monitoring tool developed for the purposes of this research. Monitoring encompassed various media formats, including comments on social media. However, less attention is paid to comments on social networks, and more to the statements of politicians (officials) and other public figures, because it is considered that their influence is greater. Oral and written statements of public figures, journalistic articles, as well as comments and posts on social networks, as well as photographs that may contain offensive messages, were monitored.

Special attention is paid to the recording of recurring incidents, ie hate speech that is repeated by certain individuals / collectives. Monitoring of hate speech was done in following manner:

- Non-selective searches reveal articles or statements that contain hate speech
- Targeted monitoring of identified media and persons with continuous monitoring and identification of hate speech.

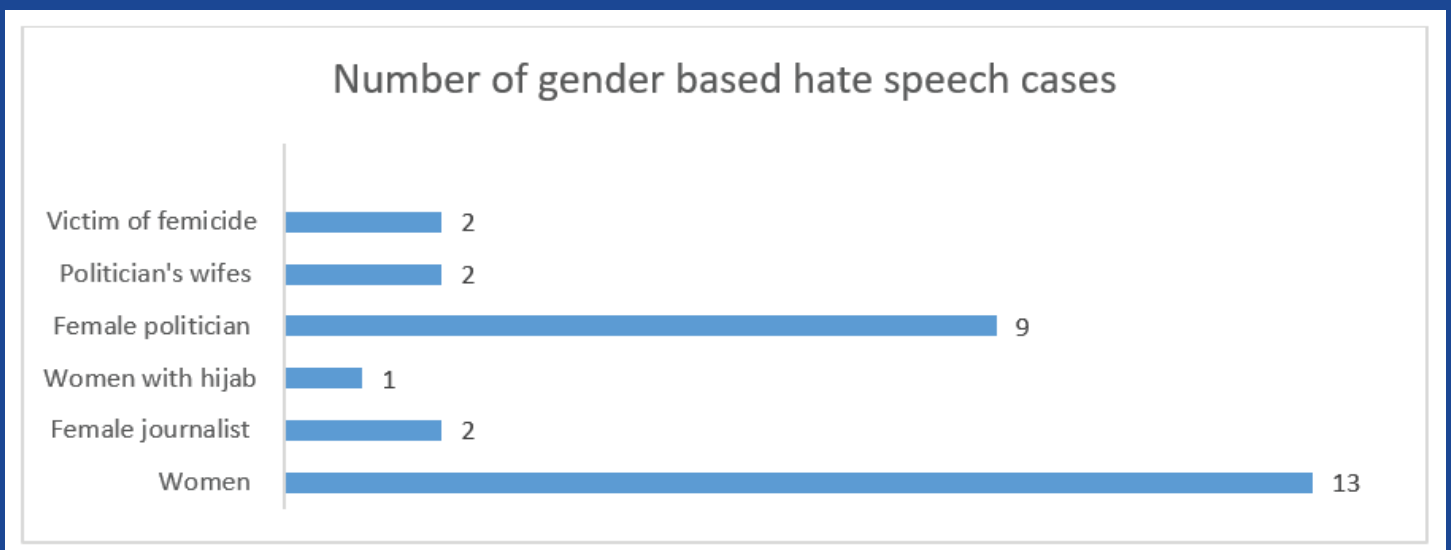
## 2. Findings of monitoring of media in Bosnia and Herzegovina: analyses of hate narratives

In period April 2022 – December 2023, in total 97 cases of hate speech were registered by media monitoring. Hate speech had its peaks for different grounds, depending on events which occurred during the year – such as pre-election period, Pride related events, commemoration of 90ties war events, etc. Hate speech was pronounced regarding four grounds: gender, ethnicity, sexual minorities and political affiliation. Therefore, analysis will focus on these grounds and narratives created on it.

### 2.1. Gender, Sexism, Sexual harassment, Misogyny

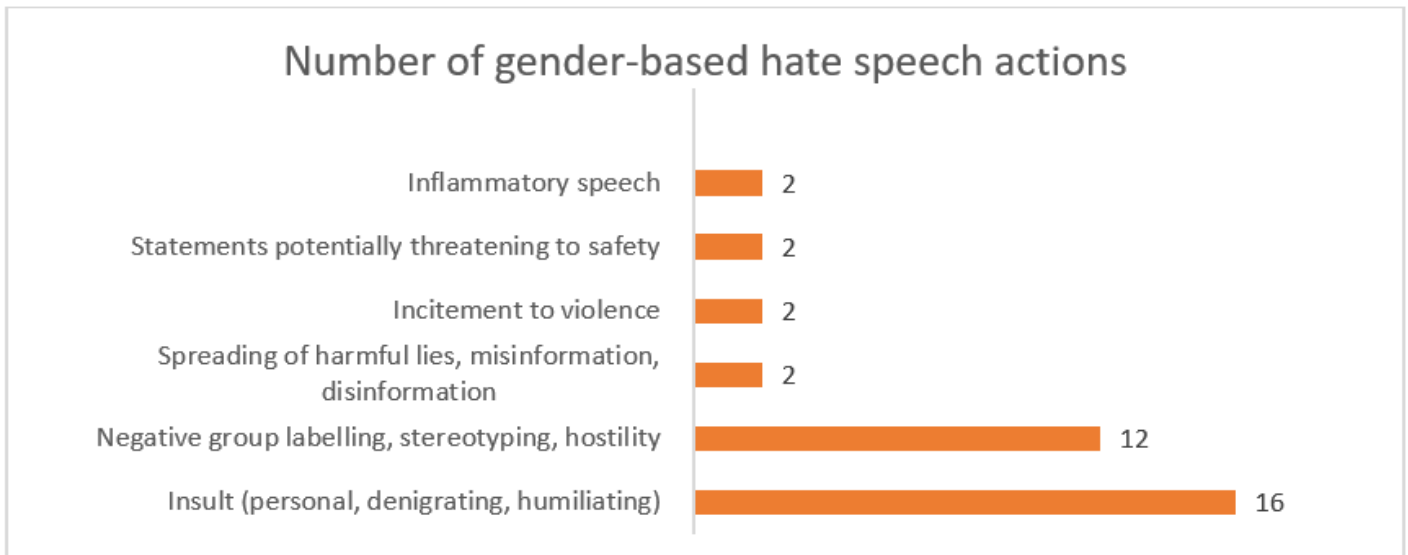
The largest number of evidenced cases of hate speech was against gender, including sexism, sexual harassment and misogyny. In total, 29 cases were registered which represent 25% of all cases. This is the greatest change from the last report – hate speech against gender replaced leading ethnicity related cases. Over numbering ethnicity as a ground for hate narratives indicate a serious scale of rising anti-gender sentiment, having in mind the fact that ethnic based hate speech has been dominating bh society for a most of the last 30 years, as a consequence of war and war rhetoric in public and political discourse.

Hate speech against gender was directed to women in general, but also to women related to their personal or professional affiliation (private: hijab, marital status, husbands; professional: journalists, politicians). It is a horrifying fact that examples of hate speech against victims of femicide were also recorded.



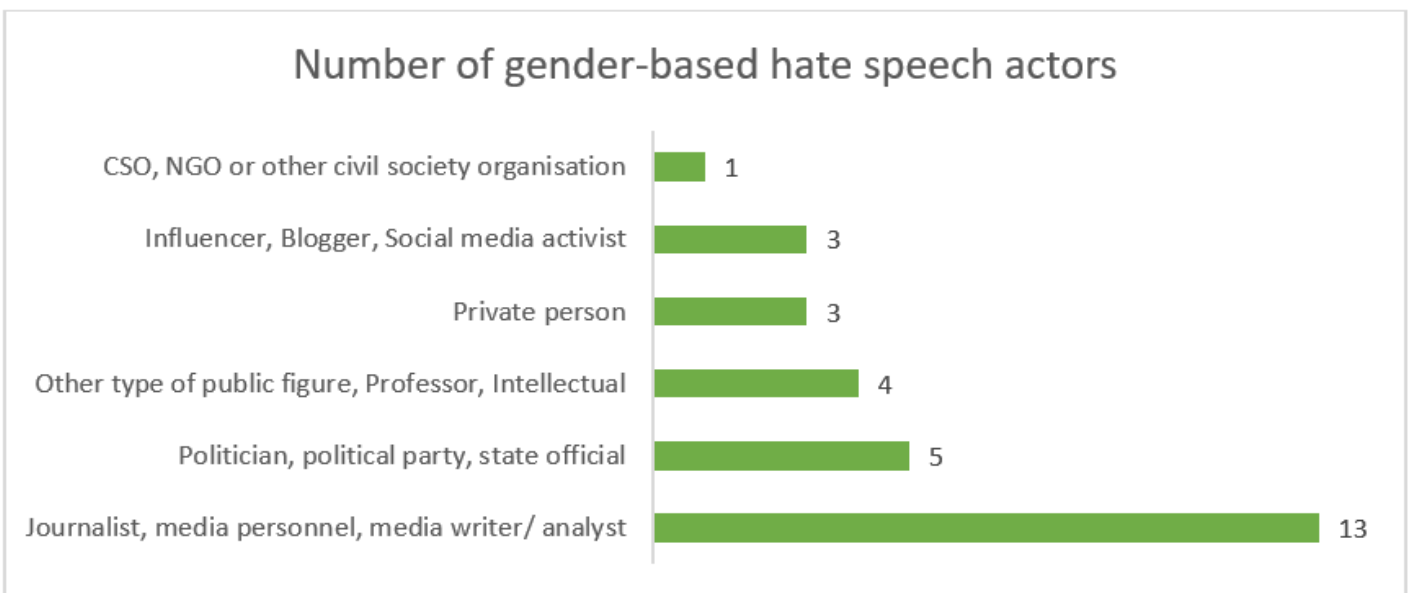
*Graph 1: Number of gender-based hate speech cases towards the individuals or groups against whom it is directed*

On actions which constitute hate speech, most common are insults (16 cases) and negative group labelling, stereotyping, hostility (12 cases). According to monitoring results threats and statements potentially threatening to safety and misuse of personal data is not recorded in this form.



*Graph 2: Number of hate speech actions per reported cases*

Journalists, media personnel, media writers / analysts were the most numerous promoters of gender-based hateful narratives (13 cases). They are followed by politicians, influencers, and private individuals.



*Graph 3: Number of hate speech actions per actors*



Women who were targeted by hate speech have been called whores, witches, wives (despite they have their professional career too). Significantly, comparing to previous report, women were targeted because of their husbands - negative image was created to discredit not only them but also their partners.

Women are reduced to the assessment of morality, appearance and abilities in relation to their gender by published content. Women who perform public functions are characterized as superficial, incompetent, talking nonsense. At the same time, their appearance was assessed, in a very negative context - especially in relation to their age (older women) or their political position i.e. as inappropriate, excessive, and shameful.

Reporting on female politicians include more attention to physical appearance and personal or family life and less to policy issues and leadership traits. This was case of female politicians both in Republika Srpska (RS) and Federation BiH (FBiH). In RS, candidate for BiH Presidency was targeted: "Jelena Trivić - she doesn't take care of personal hygiene, but she would take care of Republika Srpska?! (headline at local online portal).<sup>1</sup> In FBiH, Sarajevo Mayor, Benjamina Karić, was frequently called stupid, and content did not rely on arguments but on insults and discreditation.

Media reporting on gender-based violence was lacking ethic, responsibility and empathy, naming femicide as "end of tragic love".<sup>2</sup> Women victims of gender-based violence, including femicide, were negatively portrayed, while perpetrators represented as heroes or justified for their crimes. Instead of contributing to prevention of gender-based violence, media often sparks further victim-blaming narratives, contributing to justification of the violence itself. For example, a young woman was killed by her lover, who then committed suicide. Victim's ex-husband published a shameful post on Facebook in which, among other things, he "justified" the murder of his ex-wife. His post would not be seen by many people if it was not shared by numerous portals, including one of the most read in Bosnia and Herzegovina - Portal Depo.ba. In another example, one of most popular daily newspaper "Dnevni Avaz" reported on femicide as family tragedy, emphasizing that perpetrator was war awarded soldier, and also father of football player. Other media reported on this case as "death of Golden Lily" soldier, without any information about femicide he committed.

Further, concept of gender equality was labelled as a "imported", "western" value and portrayed as unnecessary and harmful for society. This is one of usual narratives, existing for a long time in BiH society.<sup>3</sup> For example, Resul Mehmedović, editor in chief and publicist on his Twitter says: "Feminism as a left-wing ideology was invented so that ugly women could fit into society". Also, very patriarchal model was often presented, reminding on women's (gender) roles: "I believe that a woman should not work, a mother should be at home. In order for the mother to be at home, the state must provide the father with a higher salary".<sup>4</sup> These narratives are very dangerous, in particular when they come from an important public figure. That was a case when president of the largest Bosniak party, Bakir Izetbegović, was a guest on a TV show with his wife. They talked, among other things, about family and tradition, and he stated that "Bosnian women have never been unequal, over time (...). They were completely equal, of course where they work, where they dominate, and that was the house".<sup>5</sup>

1. Jelena Trivić was a candidate of the opposition in Republika Srpska for a member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is why she is the frequent target of media reports that try to discredit her.

2. Available at: <https://avaz.ba/avaz-tv/ostalo/867565/advokat-mehmedbasic-ovo-je-kraj-tragicne-ljubavi-becirovic-je-bio-pazljiv-otac>.

3. Available at: <https://twitter.com/ResulMehmedovic/status/1549146450927489028>.

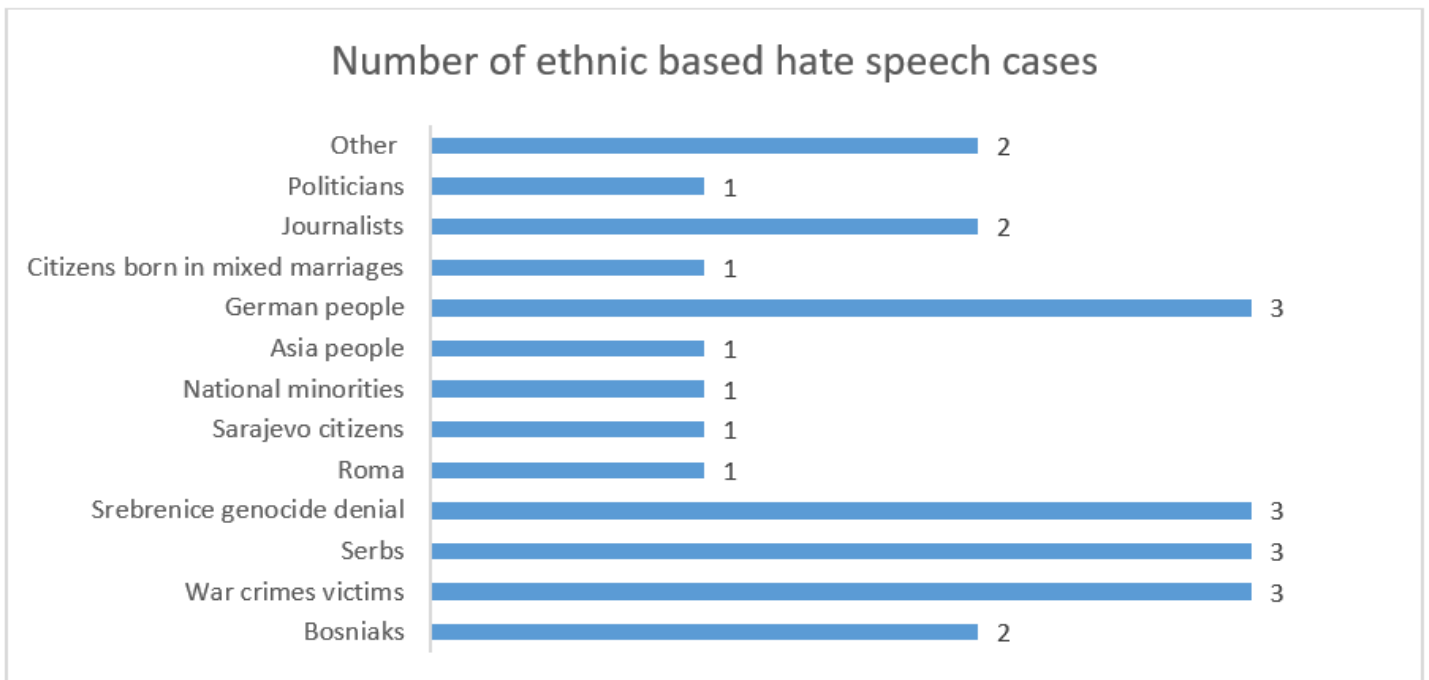
4. Available at: <https://n1info.ba/vijesti/svecenik-o-samoubistvima-maloljetnika-taktika-djavla-je-da-zaposli-oba-roditelja/>.

5. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aR1mc-oEd48>.

Sentiment: 2 - Negative actions, Rhetoric includes negative nonviolent actions associated with the group. Regardless the frequency of gender-based hate speech, it was assessed as a non-threatening in its range. Still, it is important to emphasize that these kinds of narratives contribute to preserving “traditional” values in which women are not equal, and where gender-based violence is treated as acceptable. For that reason, and also encouraging belittling women who are present in the public sphere does not contribute to security or a healthy environment for democratic processes.

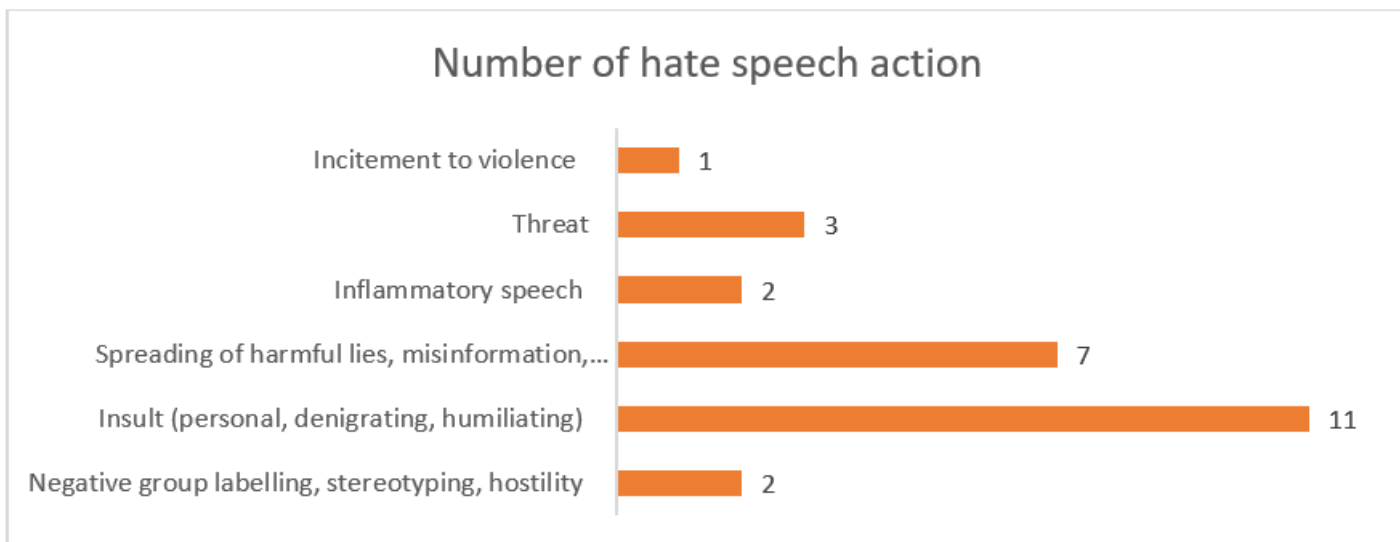
## 2.2. Ethnic discrimination, Racism, Xenophobia

Second ranked by frequency in observed period is hate speech against ethnic groups, including discrimination, racism and xenophobia. These cases were recorded 24 times, making up 21% of all cases. Ethnically-driven hate speech is almost normalised in BiH society, and in particular in political discourse. Even result is worrying, unfortunately not surprising for BiH. Ethnicity also appears in combination with other grounds, most often in combination with political engagement and journalistic work. Figures show that hate speech was pretty evenly related to several categories: genocide victims, war victims, Serbian people. In other cases, different grounds were recorded once (per ground). Interestingly, in two cases hate speech was targeting Adis Ahmetović, Member of the German Bundestag originally from BiH.



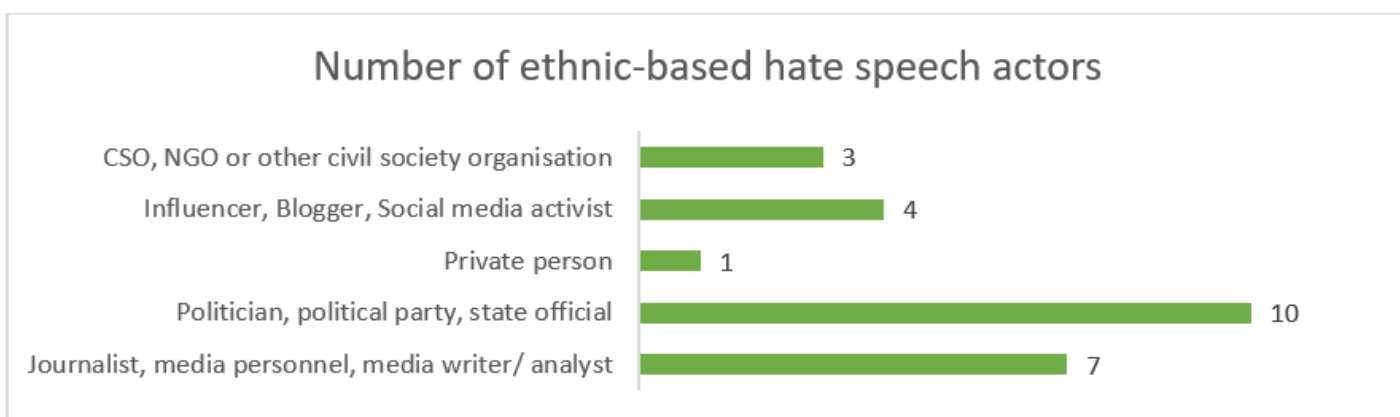
*Graph 4: Number of ethnic based hate speech cases towards the individuals or groups against whom it is directed*

The most common recorded act of hate speech regarding ethnicity is insult (11 cases), followed by spreading a harmful lie (7 cases). In this period, no misuse of personal data was recorded regarding ethnic-based hate speech.



*Graph 5: Number of hate speech actions per reported cases*

Politicians most often used hate speech based on ethnicity (10 cases). Then, journalists (7) and influencers (4) are promoting this kind of narrative.



*Graph 6: Number of hate speech actions per reported cases*

The narrative about ethnicity in BiH is primarily based on the promotion of inter-ethnic hatred and division. At the heart of the narrative is the war from the 90s, i.e. intolerance between Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats. As usual, one-sided interpretations of the war prevail, and the facts established in court proceedings are denied. In the observed period, the genocide in Srebrenica was most often denied, frequently using claims such as: there was no crime, it was not genocide, 8,000 people were not killed, "a myth that Bosniaks are building on suffering and genocide".

In addition to the Srebrenica genocide, the crimes committed in Prijedor are also contested. The way in which the suffering of non-Serbs in Prijedor is commemorated - the Day of the White Ribbons - was the trigger for these narratives. White ribbons have been called lies, fabrications, deception and propaganda. Also, group Self-respect states on its Twitter: "By forcing lies and half-truths, we will not reach reconciliation, but we will only sink deeper into mistrust, disbelief and even hatred".



Furthermore, Sarajevo is portrayed as an "Islamic quarter", which is also an established narrative from the RS. On the Day of the City of Sarajevo, the chairman of the BiH Presidency, Željka Cvijanović, spoke about how there are more foreigners than Serbs in the capital of BiH, calling out Asians as more present than Serbs.

However, reverse narratives are also present - the sowing of hatred towards Serbs by the Bosniak corps of politicians and public figures. For example, on the occasion of the suffering of Serbian children (one of the events happened in Sarajevo, when children were attacked because they were from Serbia during a sports tournament they came to; the other in an elementary school in Belgrade; while third was suicide of a boy from Laktaši) the reactions on social networks were full of hate - lack of empathy with messages "how many of our children did they kill", "what do I care about the Serbian school", "tomorrow they would slaughter us". A Director of Srebrenica Memorial Centre was among those who was posting such messages on social media.

Another tendency is visible - criticism of ethnically mixed families, marriages, circle of friends. This narrative thus primarily addresses women in these private connections, putting shame on them. For example, in earlier statements, the wife of Franjo Šarčević, the editor of the portal Prometej, was criticized for her "mixed marriage", and now both of them have been targeted because of Šarčević's writing. Stav magazine called Šarčević and his wife "carcinomas" and said that "everything should be done to prevent their metastasis".<sup>6</sup> Prometej was accused of supporting the "apartheid policy" and those who want to "thwart" the Bosniaks' struggle for statehood. This triggered a series of hateful comments towards Šarčević on social networks. Another example in this sub-narrative comes from Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Gradačac, which placed a sign on a small cemetery with the inscription "A place for burying citizens from mixed marriages. It is forbidden to perform any religious rites. It is forbidden to place any symbols on the grave-grave".<sup>7</sup>

Hate speech towards individual politician was registered in this period. The news that the Bundestag adopted a resolution on BiH, according to which it will send its soldiers to BiH, shook actors on the political scene. The Croatian National Assembly - the coordination of Croatian parties issued a statement in which it called Adis Ahmetović, a member of the Bundestag and initiator of the resolution, a BiH citizen by origin, a radical Bosniak unitarist. On another occasion, BiH Presidency member (at that time) Milorad Dodik disagreed with BiH's decision to vote to expel Russia from the Human Rights Council. On that occasion, he insulted the Bundestag envoy in front of the SPD for the Western Balkans, Adis Ahmetović, calling him "jugende".<sup>8</sup>

Sentiment: 2 - Negative actions, Rhetoric includes negative nonviolent actions associated with the group. Even it may look like these narratives are happening on abstract (political, online) level, its consequences actually are very real and do shape everyday life in BiH. First, promoters of those narratives are leading politicians (in different level of government). Second, citizens are scared of possible new conflict and prefer to hold on "lessons learnt" from 90ties – and those lessons are mono-ethnic designed. Third, online is real world - inciting violence there very easily ends in physical violence, especially in ethnic divided local communities.

6. Available at: <https://stav.ba/vijest/prometej-nikad-agresivniji-u-odbrani-aparthejda/11023>.

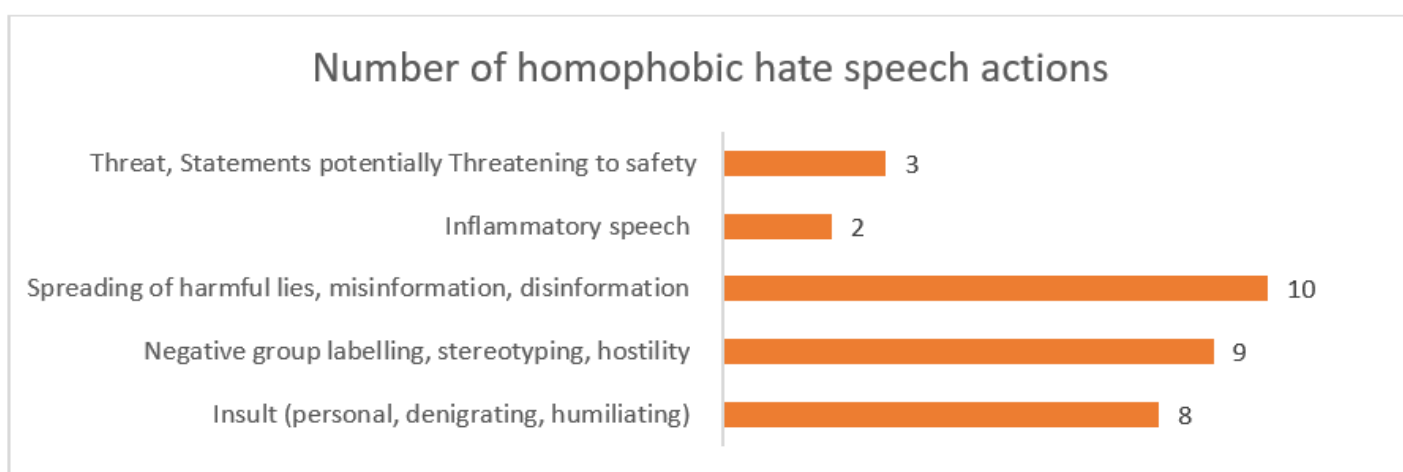
7. Available at: <https://raport.ba/medzlis-iz-gradacac-na-groblje-postavio-uvredljivu-tablu-ovo-je-mjesto-za-ukop-gradjana-iz-mjesovitih-brakova-i-ne-vide-nista-sporno/?fbclid=IwAR0lhO8P2RX-Vy7KUfqt5HNz5-u0ClXsrescAl7r41luNH3B1dRVdjiZ5s>.

8. Available at: <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/dodik-njemacke-vojnike-usporedio-s-nacistima-u-bih-nisu-dobrodošli/220407087>.

### 2.3. Sexual Minority (Homophobia)

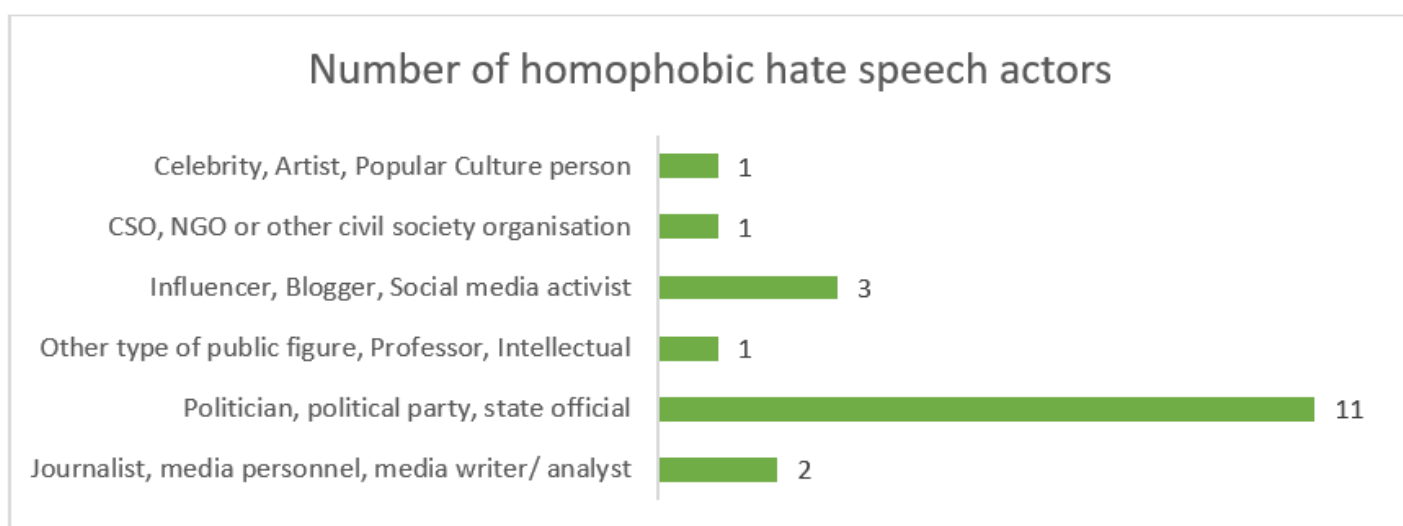
Sexual orientation was the third most represented ground for hate speech. In total, 17 cases were recorded, which represents 15% of all cases. In comparison to the previous report, this signifies a notable increase in homophobia cases (by 7 instances). All cases were directed against LGBTIQ+ persons.

As for constitutive actions of hate speech, most common are spreading of harmful lies, misinformation, disinformation (10) and negative group labelling, stereotyping, hostility (9 cases). No incitement to violence nor misuse of personal data were identified.



Graph 7: Number of hate speech actions per reported cases

Politicians take leading position in using hate speech against sexual minorities (11 cases), followed by influencers in the second position with significantly lower frequency (3 cases).



Graph 8: Number of homophobic hate speech actions per actors

There are three main narratives about sexual minorities, all already well accommodated in BiH public discourse.

First, there is an attempt to preserve what are considered traditional family values by encouraging LGBTIQ+ individuals to keep their sexual orientation private. However, this is often accompanied by derogatory terms such as 'sick,' 'disturbed,' or references to 'Sodom and Gomorrah'. Family values, calling up to religion as well, were mentioned during the announcement of the Pride Parade in Sarajevo, but also used to justify the serious violence that happened against LGBTIQ+ activists in Banja Luka. On that occasion, Banja Luka Mayor Draško Stanivuković stated: "We strive for patriarchal, traditional family relations and we know what our religion and the identity of our people are"<sup>9</sup>. Another example of homophobic speech comes from Member of the Assembly of the City of Banja Luka – he published a status on his Facebook profile on occasion of screening film which, according to him, promotes homosexual values: "A narrative of some 'normality' is imposed on us from the back door, which contradicts the views of not only the Serbian Orthodox Church, but also all monotheistic religions. It also contradicts the values on which a healthy family rests, which is a condition for the biological survival of the people".

Secondly, there is a concern expressed by some that children should be protected from what they perceive as recruitment efforts by the LGBTIQ+ community through various media channels, including films, fairy tales, cartoons, and social media. Although it sounds more like a conspiracy theory, this narrative appeals to parents with an emotional charge, presenting a series of incorrect information and introducing sexual orientation as something that children can succumb to if they are exposed to it. In one case it was even related to pedophilia, while in most cases was referring to harmful influence on children. "We are obliged to protect our children from deviants who impose their manifestations", posted on his Facebook profile Fadil Novalić, a member of the Party of Democratic Action, who was prime minister of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina for eight years.

Thirdly, there were concerns raised regarding the Pride in Sarajevo. Some critics argued that the resistance was not solely related to sexuality but also centered on the criticism that the entire city would be blocked due to the Pride, causing inconvenience for the majority. It was suggested that the 'entertainment' of a few should not compromise the basic needs of the citizens. Although the main street is also blocked for other public events, the Pride seems to be the only one that gets in the way. Along with criticism of the blockade of the city, there were also counter rallies, with the aim of defending true values and morals.

Triggers for all mentioned homophobic content are directly related to the holding of public events or the availability of content that affirms sexual minorities. This is a reflection of deep intolerance and discrimination, which "explode" on social networks and portals - and unfortunately, as it happened in Banja Luka, hate speech very easily turns into hate crimes and physical attacks. At the same time, those who are in power and should defend the rights of all citizens are also those who spread hatred against sexual minorities.

9. Available at: <https://banjaluka.net/stanivukovic-o-bh-povorci-ponosa-banjaluka-nema-zelju-da-bude-mjesto-za-tako-nesto-sarajevo-je-dovoljno-video/>.



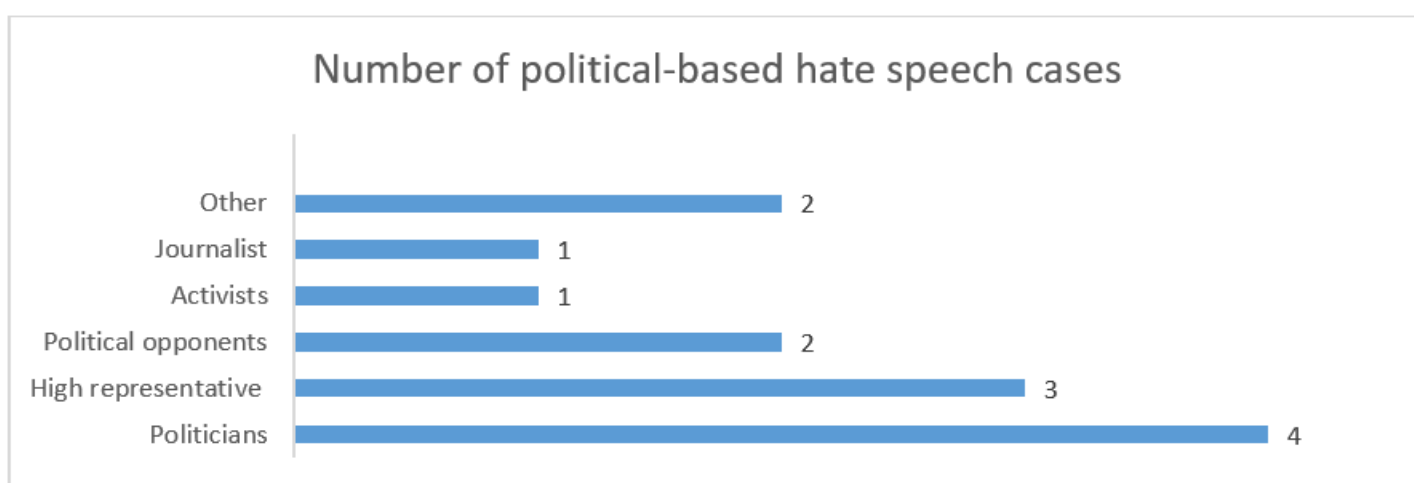
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Much anti-LGBTI hate speech occurs online, especially on social media. Leaving a vacuum regarding hate speech on social media amounts to condoning hateful language and incitement, creates a fruitful ground for this form.

Sentiment: 3 - Negative character, Rhetoric includes non-violent characterizations and insults. Same as for previous two groups, even rhetoric is not necessarily violent, it encourages to discrimination and intolerance. Minorities must be protected within democratic system, regardless of personal or religious attitudes.

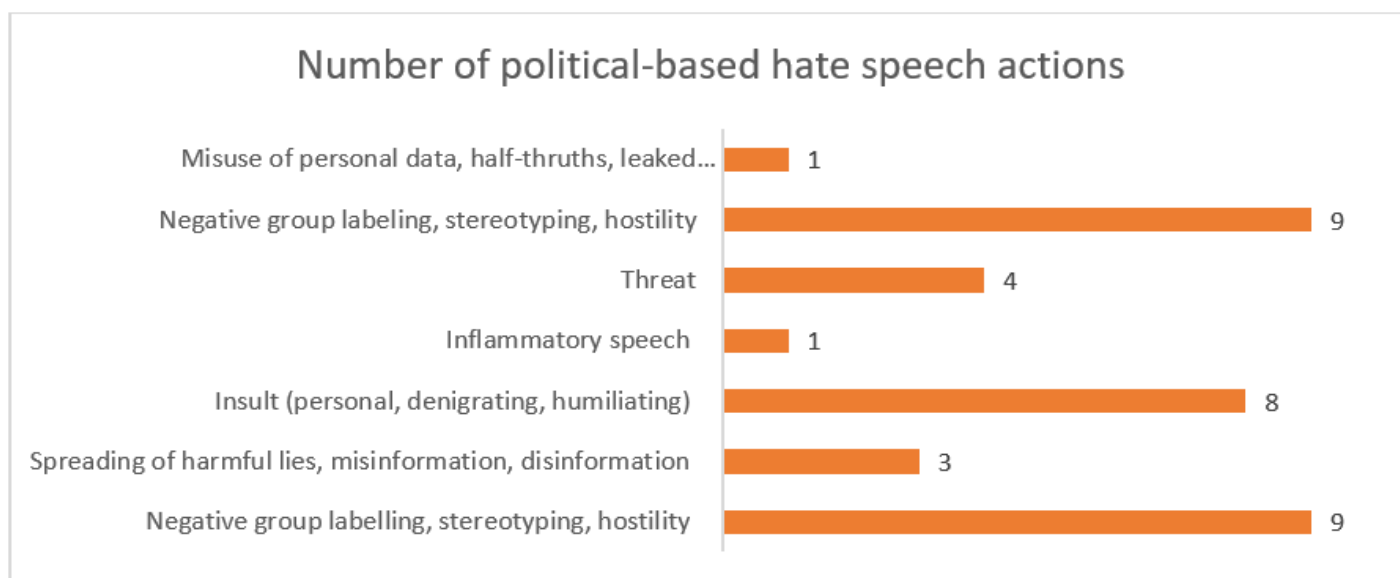
#### 2.4. Political/Ideological opponents

Hate speech directed towards political or ideological opponents occurred in 15 cases, which represent 13% of all cases. This category was not this high in last report, which may indicate the sharpening of the political discourse, but also the result of the use of hate speech mostly by politicians. In most cases hate speech was targeting politicians (4 cases) and High representative in BiH (3 cases).



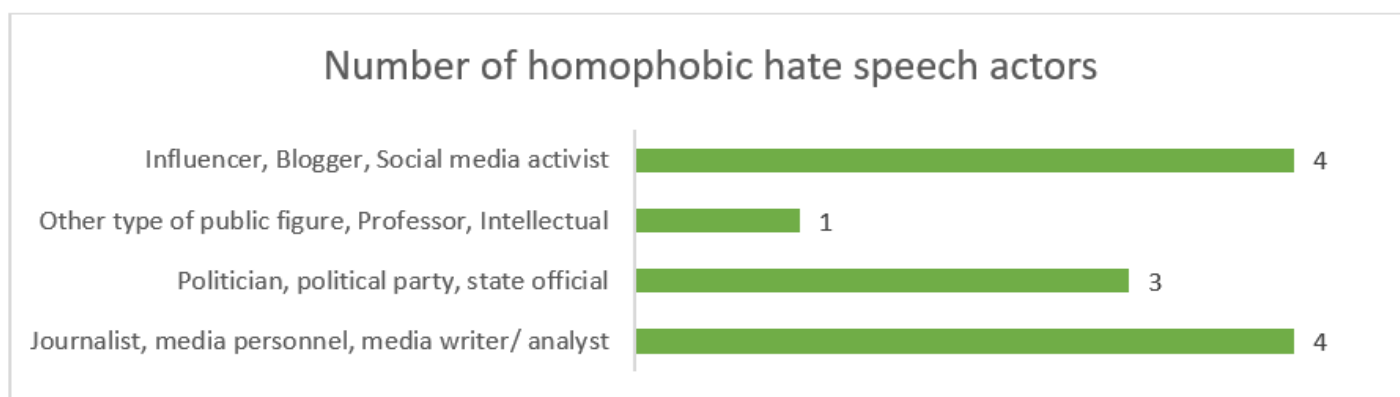
*Graph 9: Number of political-based hate speech cases*

Most common actions of hate speech against migrants are negative group labelling, stereotyping (9 cases), and insult (in 8 cases). Incitement to violence was not recorded.



*Graph 10: Number of political-based hate speech actions per reported cases*

Promoters of political hate speech are in same proportion journalists and influencers (4 each). Politicians in 3 cases were spreading hate speech on this ground.



*Graph 11: Number of homophobic hate speech actions per actors*

The narratives are primarily focused on discrediting political opponents, or inter-entity politics. Thus, the political actions of the opponents are called fascism, treason, and the opponents themselves are called "non-Bosniaks", "poturice", "sold Serbs", washed-up Chetniks. The ethnic element is clearly emphasized, so it is assessed who betrayed their own "people", who works against the interests of the "nation".

Very specifically, narratives are created in this period in relation to three persons/ parties: the High Representative in BiH, Vojin Mijatović and Naša stranka.

In terms of the High Representative in BiH Cristian Schmidt, the hate speech came from the representative of the RS government. The results show that his work is disputed, and he is called a "descendant of fascists and the people who committed the Holocaust", "fascist trash". This discrediting alludes to his German origin, but also emphasizes that he is a foreigner in BiH, and therefore undesirable to intervene in political processes.

Pro-Bosniak internet activist Jasmin Mulahusić,<sup>10</sup> known for spreading hatred through his profiles, published a post about Naša stranka - the political opponent of the Bosniak SDA. And this post contains unverified information aimed at inciting hatred towards those who speak critically about the SDA or those who are its political opponents: "Naša stranka" consists of 53 percent non-Bosniaks. They are mostly people who were in Serbia during the aggression".<sup>11</sup> In addition, a member of Naša stranka was insulted because he equated a Bosniak war general with a Croat general, both of whom were convicted of war crimes and both of whom were in the national parties that were and are in power in BiH. Because of this, the portal bosnjaci.net wrote that "he represents all evil embodied in the Great Serbian party project called "Naša stranka".<sup>12</sup> This resulted with massive insults and threats towards Naša stranka member.

Vojin Mijatović, a member of the Social Democratic Party in RS, on the other hand, found himself a target of representatives of the authorities in the RS, due to open criticism of their work and advocating for a unique BiH. The President of Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik insulted Mijatović, posting on his Twitter: "Mijatović is a classic example of poor and sold Serbs, which have existed throughout history". On the other hand, a journalist from the FBiH wrote on his profile for Mijatović: "From the very beginning, it was known that Vojin Mijatović was a washed-up Chetnik. But Bosniaks love Vlah who speaks well, and there's no help for that".

Politically motivated hate speech is published on social networks (Facebook, Twitter, TikTok) and on info portals. In one case, it was about news published by the news agency SRNA, and in another example, the news was published on television. The prevalence is on online media.

Sentiment: 2 - Negative actions, Rhetoric includes negative nonviolent actions associated with the group. Political arena seems to turn into non-ethic space. Level of hate speech is on rise, while politicians are targeted both as individuals but also their political parties. Discreditation by using disinformation, lies, insults creates certain attitude in general public, and posts on social media reach many people. It is not negligible as it ultimately affects the politicians who are targeted, as well as their private and professional lives. But certainly also on politics as such.

## 2.5. Other grounds

Considering other categories, hate speech against journalists appeared in 7 cases, while against religion in 5 cases. Hate speech which was one of the most present in previous reporting period – against migrants, now drops to 4 cases (comparing to 12 cases before). In all cases it was in relation to another specific (already elaborated ground) such as: journalists, public broadcaster, religion and migrants. These cases involved negative group labelling, stereotyping, hostility; insult (personal, denigrating, humiliating); spreading of harmful lies, misinformation, disinformation; and inflammatory speech. Prevailing sentiment in all mentioned categories: 2 - Negative actions Rhetoric includes negative nonviolent actions associated with the group.

10. Jasmin Mulahuseinović is a bot of the Party of Democratic Action, and the target of his insulting speech was everyone who ever criticized Bosniak and the politics of this party.

11. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=157853837022735&set=a.152672837540835>.

12. Available at: <http://www.bosnjaci.net/prilog.php?pid=78867>.





### 3. Comparative Analysis

Hate speech in monitored period was most often based on gender, ethnic, sexual orientation and political affiliation. It was aimed at both individuals and groups as abstract communities that share a certain personal characteristic (women, ethnic groups, LGBTIQ+ people, political opponents). In most cases, target were LGBTIQ+ people and women. Multiple discrimination occurred when identities multiplied, such as female politician, female journalist, women with hijab. Comparing with previous report, migrants were not significantly represented in registered examples of hate speech. This comes as a consequence of the reduced presence of migrants in BiH in general, and at the same time new contextual circumstances that have encouraged hateful narratives in a different direction.

Hate speech were most present at info portals (26%), social media (Facebook 18% and Twitter 17%). "Traditional" media is at third place, with 11% hate speech promoted on television). Newspaper holds 4% of registered hate speech cases. Similar to findings in last report, the largest number of cases of hate speech came from politicians (such as Milorad Dodik, President of RS, representatives of nationalistic parties). This category of actors used hate speech against all observed grounds, but was particularly focused on ethnic and LGBTIQ+ people. Journalists participated also with a high number of hate speech while doing their job on info portals, social media and traditional media. Same as for politicians, hate speech from journalists included all grounds, however highest number was against women. Influencers and social media activist are on third position by usage of hate speech frequency, and here are pretty much same persons (such as Jasmin Mulahusić, Mulahuseinović). Since political social media activists are often functioning as political bots, it is not surprising that their hate speech was mostly against political opponents.

In most cases, hate speech was expressed through insult (53 cases), which is for 8 cases more than in previous period, and replaced negative group labelling on first place. Insults are mostly forms of gender-based and ethnically based hate speech. Although they are present in large numbers in other bases as well, in these two they are very pronounced and reckless. Spreading of harmful lies, misinformation, disinformation is placed as second most often hate speech form (29 cases). This form was mostly used when targeting LGBTIQ+ people, by installing and promoting incorrect, harmful and populist narrative. Third most common form of hate speech is negative group labelling, stereotyping, hostility (28 cases), and it mostly affected political opponents. This is an interesting finding, because political discourses are increasingly devoid of professionalism and internet bots do the "dirty" work for political parties on social networks. This means a continuous campaign to discredit political opponents, with abundant use of hate speech.

Spread and reach of hate speech follows up on tendencies where these narratives are mostly represented – online media, which means they multiply quickly and reaching high number of people. With online media and social networks become easier to track the reach – looking at the number of sharing, liking, commenting. However, impact of traditional media should not be neglected – informative programme, as well as political debates still have its own reach and audience trust in it.





## 4. Preventive and ex post actions to combat hate and disinformation narratives

Hate speech processing in BiH is very limited. Some cases have been recorded for prohibited hate speech under the BiH Election Law, but its implementation is restricted to pre-election period only. Misdemeanour and criminal proceedings remain rare (or none). The self-regulatory body conducts procedures in which hate speech is established in the BiH media, but the scope of these recommendations is limited because they are not legally binding. Although self-regulatory policy is important in this area, it is necessary to point out that in the current level of hate speech and its normalisation in public discourse, just is not enough. Societal, political, media level of conciseness about harmfulness of hate speech is extremely low, and this directly contributes to normalisation of hate speech, both on and off-line.

During the period of one year - from October 2021 to October 2022 - the Balkan Research Network of Bosnia and Herzegovina documented a total of 124 hate activities, which in addition to statements also includes incidents. Although, according to information from the police and prosecutor's offices, nine cases were established and six investigations were initiated, only in one case was the investigation completed and an indictment filed. Additionally, 22 entries in the aforementioned database were categorized as denial of crimes or glorification of war crimes convicts, and the Prosecutor's Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina opened only three cases, and not a single indictment was filed.<sup>13</sup> In Country Report for BiH 2023, European Commission noticed that criminal prosecution is limited to the incitement of religious and ethnic hatred on the internet or social networks. The authorities have not taken any measures to counter hate speech, which remains present in official discourse.

13. Husarić-Omerović, Azra (2023). Milorad Dodik is the biggest single source of hateful narratives in BiH, 10.2.2023., detektor.ba, Available at: <https://detektor.ba/2023/02/10/milorad-dodik-najveci-pojedinacni-izvor-mrzilackih-narativa-u-bih/>.



There is no monitoring or enforcement of the prohibition of hate speech in online media. 56 reports were filed and eight rulings, of which six convictions, were handed down for hate speech in 2022, compared to 70 reports and eight convictions in 2021.<sup>14</sup>

Same as in last report, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of media literacy programs, which are an essential factor in educating the public. Numerous programs have been implemented so far, or are being implemented now, which in the long run should improve the way of communication. Also it should certainly free the online sphere of perception of impunity and uncontrolled promotion of hate speech.

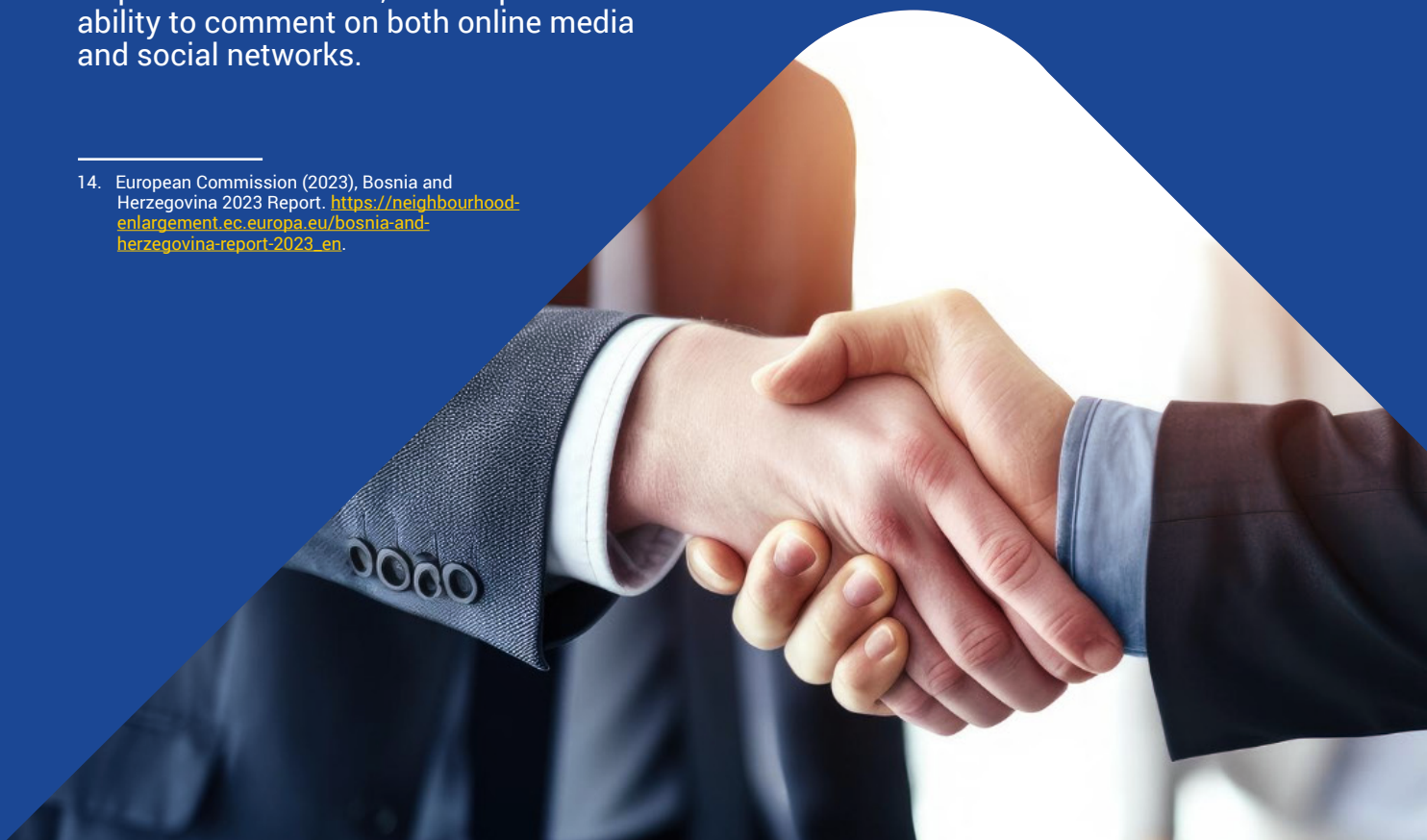
## Conclusion

In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is difficult to determine what came first - hate speech that institutionalized a certain narrative, or a narrative that uses hate speech for its own maintenance. Observing the findings of hate speech mapping, it is obvious that stereotypes, misogyny, homophobia, intolerance, single-mindedness prevail in public discourse. This applies to all monitored grounds for hate speech - gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political affiliation. Hate speech increases further when some of these characteristics intersect. Brutality, sexism and lack of ethics in writing, sharing and commenting on content that uses hate speech only produces new and new cases of hatred. In the online world, speed and quantity are key - once sparked hate rolls as a snowball. And legislation, self-regulation and fragmented prevention can rarely really do anything about it.

As expected, certain forms of hate speech are continuously retained in the BiH public space, and coherently monitor socio-political events. However, some forms of hate speech are evolving very quickly in response to social events, using new media and public spaces such as personal Facebook, Twitter profiles and the ability to comment on both online media and social networks.

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14. European Commission (2023), Bosnia and Herzegovina 2023 Report. [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/bosnia-and-herzegovina-report-2023\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/bosnia-and-herzegovina-report-2023_en).





The hate speech that this monitoring analysis has dealt with has a very adaptable nature and reaches a large number of users by creating and maintaining harmful and exclusive narratives about groups and individuals.

Women, ethnic groups, LGBTIQ+ people, politicians, journalists were targeted by different forms of hate speech. Mostly politicians and journalists are the bearers of hateful narratives, while the most common forms are insults and negative group labelling. The difference that appears relates to whether the targets are groups or individuals and what is intended to be achieved with that rhetoric. In the case of women and politicians, individuals were more often directly attacked, but even in those cases it was clearly seen that the value represented by the person was actually being attacked. With LGBTIQ+ people, it was more about targeting the community as such. Ethnicity, on the other hand, was a uniform targeting of both individuals and groups.

Another difference concerns the goal of these narratives: very clearly, anti-gender attempts to return to "original" values, criticizing women who break out of those patriarchal frameworks. Politicians and ethnic groups try to maintain the status quo - divisions, clear boundaries between groups, preservation of the system of mono-ethnic corps. The anti-LGBTIQ+ narrative fights against progress - the presence of diversity and minorities, their equality and visibility. The whole "family values" campaign was put into motion in this case.

Hate speech against women was on rise in observed period, targeting women not only because of their gender, but also their profession, marital status, political affiliation. In few cases ethnicity intervened with gender, creating very hostile attitude toward individual. Based on findings of mapping, women in politics face biased, sexist, and discriminatory media treatment. This goes hand in hand with misogynist narrative about women that was promoted in observing period. Sensationalism and tabloid-style reporting on women victims of gender-based violence are present, encouraging hate speech towards victims in sharing and commenting media content.

Ethnically-driven hate speech has its roots in 30 years of repeating and evolving into official narrative in BiH. In observing period findings show that the triggers for ethnic-based hate speech were concrete events related to political decisions or events. Here it appeared as a reaction to certain events, when it was felt that nationalist narratives and political positions were potentially threatened. On the other hand, certain events, such as the commemoration in Srebrenica, the Day of the White ribbons in Prijedor - usually every year are accompanied by hate speech that includes the denial of crimes and responsibility. In recent years, however, the practice of celebrating (for example, birthdays of convicted war criminals) during the commemoration of civilian casualties has developed. However, it is very devastating that hateful narratives based on ethnicity appear as a reaction to difficult human stories, events that have nothing to do with war or ethnicity. This indicates how poisoned and obsessed BiH society is with inter-ethnic hatred. It is necessary to emphasize that the promoters today are the same ones who led to this situation in society - politicians. Lastly, sexual minorities remain as hate speech target. Narratives here count on massive response, and engagement of citizens. Consequently, the rhetoric is consistent among various politicians, social media activists, influencers, and journalists.



**Address**

Center for Investigative Reporting  
Gabriele Moreno Locatelli 11  
71000 Sarajevo, BiH

**Tel:** +387 33 560 040; **Fax:** +387 33 560 045  
**E-mail:** [info@cin.ba](mailto:info@cin.ba); **Web:** [cin.ba](http://cin.ba)



# MONITORING REPORT ON HATE SPEECH IN BIH

LEJLA GAČANICA